

Maugham's Philosophical Views and Their Role in Shaping His Aesthetics

Tagaeva Tamara Bahodirovna

Senior Teacher of the Department "English language and Literature", Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages

Abstract: This article explores the philosophical views of S. Maugham, which influenced the condescension and understanding of the author's personality. William Somerset Maugham is primarily known as a playwright, short story writer, and novelist; he is not a creator of literary theory in the strict sense of the word, but his numerous observations on his own work and that of other writers; his literary criticism of certain Russian and Western classics; his philosophical and aesthetic sketches allow us to speak of him as a major and extraordinary scholar of literature, who offered his original conception of the novel.

Keywords: anthropocentric model, philosophical system, stylistic devices, novel, literary style, plot, personage.

It must be said that in Maugham's literary-critical essays this question occupies one of the central places. Thus, in the article "The Decline and Destruction of the Narrative", Maugham notes that "the love of stories is contained in human nature and is as old as the world". Already in his youth, S. Maugham formed his own system of values, his own concept of a person. Of the philosophers of the past, Maugham was most influenced by Kant, Hume and Spinoza (from Spinoza's Ethics, the title for one of S. Maugham's most famous novels is taken - "Of Human Bondage" - "On Human Slavery"; in Russian translation - "The Burden of Human Passions") [1,78]; from the thinkers of modern times - Darwin and Spencer. Spinoza's Maugham was close to his pantheism, the doctrine of humanity as a whole connected with the substance of the higher mind. Spinoza rejected the idea of free will. In Maugham, such people often look like creatures dependent on their nature, which allowed (and not unreasonably) to associate Maugham with the naturalistic tradition (it is no coincidence, of course, and the fascination with the ideas of Darwin and Spencer). "I don't see much difference between people," Maugham writes in his book "Summing Up". - They are all a mixture of great and small, of virtues and vices, of nobility and baseness. Others have more strength of character or more opportunities, so they can give more will to one or another of their instincts. Social optimism is not peculiar to Maugham, he was a skeptic and an agnostic. His sober view of a person was often mistaken for cynicism. Dismissing such reproaches, Maugham writes: "I am often called a cynic [7,3]. I am accused of making people worse in my books than they really are. In my opinion, I am innocent of this. I'm just identifying some of their traits that many writers turn a blind eye to. In my opinion, the most characteristic thing about people is inconsistency. I don't remember ever seeing a complete personality." Social optimism is not peculiar to Maugham, he was a skeptic and an agnostic. His sober view of a person was often mistaken for cynicism. Dismissing such reproaches, Maugham writes: "I am often called a cynic. I am accused of making people worse in my books than they really are. In my opinion, I am innocent of this. I'm just identifying some of their traits that many writers turn a blind eye to. In my opinion, the most characteristic thing about people is inconsistency [2,33]. Maugham has a very peculiar idea of harmony - "Incongruous features get along in a person and even produce harmony in the aggregate". But this by no means unromantic concept of man did not make Maugham a satirist (although some of his things, especially stories, are close to this genre), rather it is a philosophical view of

personality, there is a lot of condescension and understanding in it - "... I did not condemn my characters for what was bad in them, and did not praise for the good I finally learned to forgive everything and everyone. Don't expect too much from people. Be grateful for the good treatment and don't complain about the bad". Entering into an unspoken polemic with romantics, Maugham states: "The norm is something that is rare... The norm is the ideal." There is a great depth of meaning hidden in this paradoxical definition: the ideal is not something that is far and unimaginable, but something that a person is called to strive for as a must, but this is what is most difficult for him. The absence of illusions in the view of man made possible Maugham's interest in Darwin and Spencer. «... I welcomed the hypothesis of survival of the fittest... I believed that we were pathetic puppets at the mercy of a hopeless fate". "My philosophical system," writes Maugham, "was based on two principles: the relativity of Things and the Periphery of Man."

Here Maugham approaches not only naturalism, but also modernism: anthropocentric models were rejected by him. It is agnosticism, and in combination with mysticism, the recognition of the mystery of life, that explains Maugham's interest in positivism. Maugham's mysticism is positivist. In *Summing Up*, Maugham writes that the mystical is unprovable, and if it cannot be proved that there is a God, this does not mean that there is no God. Maugham admits that he is no stranger to a mystical sense of mystery, "and yet I am an agnostic," he writes further, "and practically agnosticism is expressed in the fact that a person lives as if there is no God" [8,54]

However, we note that the declaration does not fully correspond to reality, and the ethics of Maugham is much more complicated. Questions of morality have always been in the writer's field of view. And Maugham admits that he gradually abandoned materialism and mechanical determinism (and even before, he did not agree with the positivists in everything: "I despise Spencer for his belief in progress"). Kant helped him in this (and, perhaps, an innate sense of justice; and the Protestant upbringing in his uncle's house probably did not go in vain). Kant's ethics (categorical imperative) was consonant with the deep structures of Maugham's personality.

Maugham considers the problem of evil to be one of the most important problems facing a person, and this suggests that he was not completely deaf to religious issues. Maugham himself declares that aestheticism and snobbery are alien to him. "The value of art is not beauty, but right actions," he says. Despite his seeming cynicism, Maugham highly values virtue, quite rightly noting that it is a reward in itself. Of all the virtues of Maugham, mercy gets the highest rating. "Mercy is the best thing in kindness." "In charity, the sexual instinct is sublimated, but it communicates to this feeling a part of its warm and life-giving power" [8 ,216]. Mercy for Maugham is one of the forms of manifestation of love. All this brings Maugham's position closer to the Christian one and suggests that despite his anticlerical motives (for example, in the story "Rain"), he was not an unequivocal atheist or anti-Christian.

Maugham gives a deep and unexpected definition of kindness - "Kindness is a defensive reaction of humor to the tragic meaninglessness of fate". Here it is necessary to note the closeness of the views of Maugham and the ancient Greek philosophy of Stoicism.

The idea of the need for a moral position for a writer is also heard in Maugham's Notebooks - "A novelist must maintain a childishly naive faith in the importance of things that common sense does not attach importance to. A novelist cannot grow up to the end" [5, 266]. Art should teach humility, patience and generosity.

And, although Maugham quite often emphasizes the need for the authenticity of a work of art, he points out that it should not be synonymous with meaninglessness and thoughtlessness. What is the purpose of art? - he asks the question in his "writer's notebooks". - One-attraction? Rest? And he answers like this: "Art for art's sake is like gin for gin's sake". The fascination of the plot in Maugham means the drama of the action, the lack of expectation, the inconsistency that creates a conflict. B. Shklovsky believed that "a work of fiction almost always contains a contradiction." The content of the work is carried out precisely through the creation of these tangible contradictions. "The plot," writes B. Shklovsky in the book *Bowstring*. About the dissimilarity of

the similar" is not a record of a fact, it is an artistic design of a series of events - their collision, their comparison".

According to Maugham, aesthetic experience affects a person and, in this way, causes an active attitude to life in him. It is necessary, first of all, to note Maugham's great interest in people, hence, in our opinion, the wealth of plots in his legacy. "I have never felt a lack of money," Maugham admits in the book "Summing Up". As well as J. Galsworthy and many other researchers, Maugham emphasizes the inextricable connection of plot and character. "I take living people and invent situations for them, tragic and comic, arising from their characters". Just like Galsworthy, Maugham's character is primary, and the plot is secondary (not a person for a story, but a story for a person).

Maugham speaks of the need for a single plot line and that governs the reader's interest (in a novel there are usually several of them, they can go in parallel, unfold in different space-time planes, but the work must have a center).

In his aesthetic works, Maugham raises the question of the correspondence of the character to the genre. A complex personality with contradictory tendencies of psychology is more in line with the genre of the novel and requires a detailed plot; in the story, the characters should be different - brighter, but less in-depth. The forms of character manifestation in the novel and the story are also different: in the novel-there is no comprehensive study, and in the story - the whole is restored in parts, according to individual signs-symptoms. The moment of recognition is very important in the character. Each work should be (ideally) the result of something deeply experienced, personal. An artist creates to free his soul. The desire to tell and listen is one of the most archaic and organic needs for a person - "As a prose writer, I go out, through countless generations, to those who told fairy tales around the campfire in the cave of Neolithic man".

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